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Quitman Family**

Marine Gazette

Picture of John A. Quitman, Was General in Mexican War at that time, lost shoe in muddy ditch
marching into Mexico City

Eli Smith
762-2265



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JOHN ANTHONY QUITMAN

(09-01-1799 - 07-17-1858)
President: 1847 - 1848

Soldier and fifteenth governor of Mississippi, he was born at Rhinebeck, NY, son of D Frederick Henry and Anna Elizabeth (Huecke) Quitman. Quitman's father intended him for the ministry and he studied at Hartwick Seminary, Otsego Co., NY. After graduation in 1816, he became a tutor in its classical department and later taught at Mount Airy College, Germantown, PA. In 1819 Quitman moved to Ohio to study law. Two years later he moved to Natchez, MS. A successful planter, Quitman soon developed considerable reputation and influence.



John Anthony Quitman
Courtesy of the Schultz Collection

From the outset, he identified himself with those opposed to dueling, , and other vices. He became southern to the core, adopting throughout the rest of his life the views of the adopted state. Elected to the legislature in 1827, Quitman later served as Chancellor of the Superior Court (1828-1834), member of the Constitutional Committee (1832), and in 1835 President of the Senate and for a short time acting Governor. He fought for the independence of Texas in 1836, was afterwards a Major-General of the Mississippi militia and in 1839 elected judge of the court of errors and appeals.

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John Anthony Quitman

Commissioned a Brigadier-General of volunteers by President Polk, July 1, 1846, he rendered gallant and noble service during the Mexican War under Generals Taylor and Scott. He was in the Battle of Monterey and marched from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, during which time he was engaged in many daring exploits. On the morning of September 13, 1847 his division assaulted the castle at Chapultepec.

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John Anthony Quitman
Courtesy of the Ron Riches Collection

Dashing across the plain carrying the artillery they found on their route, Quitman's troops forced their way up the side of the steep hill on which the ancient fortress was built in the face of destructive fire. Having gained the summit, they carried the castle assault thereby securing the key to Mexico City. In the afternoon of that day, Quitman led his division in an attack on the Belen Gate, which they carried at the point of the bayonet. His troops were the first within the city walls. He received the surrender of the citadel and was appointed by General Scott civil and military governor of the city — "the only American who ever ruled in the halls of the Montezumas".



John Anthony Quitman

For his distinguished services in the Mexican War Congress voted him a sword and he received a brevet to Major-General. While Scott assumed responsibility for overall occupation policy, the administrative responsibility for implementing the policy fell on Quitman's shoulders. After restoring order to the City, Gen. Quitman was able to concentrate on administrative tasks: burial procedures, prison security, replacing window glass on the palace, setting exchange rates, processing restaurant application and handling leave-of-absence requests. Resistance persisted into October as thousands of enemy troops besieged the American garrison at Puebla. Reinforcements from Vera Cruz came under attack from both organized enemy units and guerillas. Quitman volunteered to Scott to lead two thousand men and clear the National Highway to the coast.

"...[H]e gave further vent to his own imperialistic emotions. If the Mexicans refused a peace, he wrote Eliza, then perhaps the only alternative would be to 'make this beautiful & rich country a portion of the United States.' Again inviting public attention to his views, he sent [Senator] Henry Foote an exuberant burst of manifest destiny: 'I speak to you boldly, as we spoke when the Texas question arose, hold on to this country. It is destiny, it is ours.'

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"Quitman advocated annexation for both economic and geopolitical reasons. 'Take the mines, & the sugar & coffee plantations, the olive groves, the vineyards, the bellowing herds & bleating flocks that slake their thirst in the snows of Orizaba and Popocatepetl, and lie down at night beneath the cocoa groves of the vallies [sic].' If the United States did not seize the moment, anarchy would make Mexico a "waif" vulnerable to seizure by England, which had considerable mining interests in the land. Could the United States afford, moreover, to concede to other nations control of transit between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans across Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec? Such transit would one day provide 'the power to tax the commerce of the world.' Significantly, Quitman avoided mention of Mexico's meaning for slavery expansion, and argued that Foote need not worry that annexation would pose a danger to the Union."

Quitman believed patience was the most promising means to accomplish annexation. He ruled out military conquest of the entire nation, stating that it would require 50,000 men to garrison every state capital and important city. He opposed the policy promoted by John C. Calhoun and others that the army should simply evacuate the capital and retire to a defensive line in northern Mexico and wait. Rather, Quitman recommended that 10,000 troops be committed to continued occupation of the capital and Vera Cruz. It seems that despite his beliefs about annexation, Quitman desired no active role in Mexico. Meeting with Scott in Puebla, he requested a command suited to his rank. He had written Sen. Foote that he would openly and boldly advocate annexation were he by his side in Washington. Yet, Gen. Scott stated he needed all the officers he had and would allow relief only in severe cases. Perhaps getting restless of his mundane tasks as Military Governor, on October 25 Quitman wrote Scott's headquarters, again asking for a suitable command. He asked permission to report personally to Secretary of War Marcy for a new permanent assignment. Scott granted permission and endorsed Quitman for a command he merited by rank. He left Mexico City on November 1, 1847



John Anthony Quitman
Courtesy of the Breithaupt Collection

President Polk reacted cautiously to Quitman's petition for active division command. He agreed to designate Quitman for Gen. Taylor's former command, but tied his support to Congressional approval of a then pending ten-regiment bill. While awaiting word on his command, Quitman became the subject of some political speculation. There were rumors that he would receive the nomination of the Democratic party for either President or Vice President. Meanwhile, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was finalized, and, as the need for new regiments no longer existed, his hopes for new command vanished.

Upon his return to Mississippi, Quitman was elected governor in November, 1849. Because of deficiencies in the Compromise of 1850, Quitman believed states had the constitutional right to secede though for the present he declined to actively encourage it. He wrote and spoke of southern grievances against the North while arguing that inflexible insistence on southern constitutional rights provided only "the mode of preserving the Union of the Constitution". He served from January, 1850 to February

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1851 when he resigned having become embroiled in controversy over annexation of Cuba. Favoring annexation of Cuba, Quitman was indicted in Federal Court for violating Federal neutrality laws, having favored Gen. Narciso Lopez's attempt to seize control of that country. Lopez had previously offered Quitman command of the army he intended to lead in the revolution, which Quitman declined.

The proceeding was a farce prosecuted by unionists suggesting the Cuba movement was really a conspiracy to set up a southern empire after secession. After three hung juries all defendants were released. It was suggested by the states-rights Democrats that Quitman again run for governor. He participated in a series of debates leading to the party's nominating convention, but declined to run when convention delegates overwhelmingly supported pro-compromise candidates. He had been unable to convince Mississippi River planters, who had the most at stake in slavery, that northern aggression posed an immediate threat to their survival. The effect of the sudden pro-compromise stance of Mississippi was a watershed event in the looming secession crisis. South Carolina, about to hold its state convention, was close to secession but with no hope that Mississippi would follow its lead, its delegates endorsed secession in principle but decided it was not timely to then do so. The secession movement had collapsed throughout the south.



J. A. Quitman

John Anthony Quitman

During 1856-1858 Quitman served as a member of the 34th Congress and was Chairman of its Military Committee. James Buchanan named him Commander-in-Chief of the military cortege for his upcoming inauguration. In February, 1857, while staying at the National Hotel in preparation of Buchanan's inauguration, Quitman became seriously ill. Varying accounts suggest he contracted National Hotel disease, akin to the more recent Legionnaire's disease known in recent times. During the frigid winter, the plumbing at the hotel had frozen, causing a backup of sewage into its kitchen which reportedly contaminated food. Others suggest abolitionists had tainted the hotel's food with poison in an effort to eliminate Democratic leaders. In either case, Quitman became seriously

and never fully recovered. After returning to his home, Monmouth Plantation, he endured months of sickness. Despite his lack of full recovery, he returned to Washington in December, 1857 for the next Congress. Over the next many months his health saw-sawed between fair and poor. In early June, 1858 Quitman's health began failing rapidly. Returning home following the close of Congress on June 14, he required assistance to move. He died on July 17th.

Asserting the right of secession and the desirability of forming a confederacy of the slave-holding states, Quitman anticipated by nearly ten years the action which led to the Civil War.

Gen. Quitman's beautiful home, Monmouth Plantation, has been lovingly restored by Ron and Lani Riches into one of America's finest bed and breakfast inns. The Aztec Club held its spring meeting there in June, 1998. Visit Monmouth Plantation by [clicking here](#)

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